

# HELP WANTED

# Stenographers Secretaries Typists

The Bureau of Employment Security, in cooperation with its affiliated State employment security agencies, undertook a survey of the labor market for secretaries, stenographers, and typists in 31 selected major metropolitan areas during August 1955. The object of the survey, sponsored jointly by the Labor Department's Women's Bureau and BES, was to determine the nature and extent of labor shortages in these occupations, and from these facts to develop suitable program recommendations. Employment offices in the selected areas were requested to submit statistical operating data and narrative analyses of the labor market situation according to uniform reporting procedures.

This study is based on these area reports supplemented by data from the Bureau of the Census, Bureau of Education, Public Health Service, Bureau of Labor Statistics and other sources.

The following areas participated in the survey: Los Angeles and San Francisco-Oakland, Calif.; Denver, Colo.; Hartford, Conn.; Washington, D. C.; Miami, Fla.; Atlanta, Ga.; Chicago, Ill.; Indianapolis, Ind.; Louisville, Ky.; New Orleans, La.; Baltimore, Md.; Boston, Mass.; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.; Kansas City and St. Louis, Mo.; Newark, N. J.; Buffalo and New York, N. Y.; Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; Oklahoma City, Okla.; Portland, Oreg.; Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pa.; Dallas and Houston, Texas; Salt Lake City, Utah; Richmond, Va.; Seattle, Wash.; and Milwaukee, Wis. The reports in most cases related to the entire labor market area containing each of the cities named. These areas account for more than one-third of the country's nonagricultural employment.

**T**ODAY, a young woman with a high school diploma and the ability to operate a typewriter with reasonable proficiency faces a rosy labor market. And if she can also take shorthand, competition for her services in most of our metropolitan areas is keen. The labor market for secretaries, stenographers, and typists is a sellers' market--it has been for some time, and no significant easing of the shortages appears in sight.

These are the salient facts to emerge from a Bureau of Employment Security survey of the labor market for secretaries, stenographers, and typists, conducted in August 1955, in 31 important areas around the country. Public employment office recruitment experience, augmented by other local information, produced a dominant theme of "shortage."

The causes of the shortage and its degree vary from area to area. Among the causes are the insufficient number of young people taking training in these fields; high labor turnover resulting from women leaving the labor market to assume family responsibilities; employer specifications (particularly age) and worker preferences that make the matching of openings and applicants more difficult; and, finally, the attractions of competing activities, such as factory employment.

### The Demand Is Great

Substantial and continued demand characterizes the labor market for secretaries, stenographers, and typists in area after area. It is a demand which, according to most reporting areas, has been rising almost steadily for a decade. It

is hard to fill even in periods of strong employment.

There is no current count of the number of employed secretaries, stenographers, and typists. According to the Census of Population, there were 1,589,000 employed in these occupations in 1950; almost 95 percent were women. Between 1940 and 1950, employment in this field of work increased 50 percent--double the rate of gain for all occupations.

In 1950, secretaries, stenographers, and typists comprised 2.8 percent of total employment, as compared with 2.4 percent in 1940. In the large urban centers, the ratios run higher as might be expected. The proportion of such employment in surveyed areas ranged from 3.0 percent in Buffalo to 8.6 percent in Washington, D. C.

The abundance of job opportunities is evidenced by the fact that in local offices of all the surveyed areas, openings in these occupations comprise a far higher proportion of all openings than would appear to be warranted by the incidence of employment in these fields. To take a dramatic example, one-fourth of all non-agricultural jobs available in the San Francisco-Oakland local offices at the beginning of August were for secretaries, stenographers, and typists while these workers were 4.5 percent of employment (in 1950). Although the gap was narrower in other areas, it was wide enough to be impressive. Openings in the selected occupations comprised anywhere from 6 to 20 percent of all jobs available in local offices; in Washington the corresponding ratio was 32 percent, but many of the stenographer vacancies were Government overseas positions. The ratio of secretary-stenographer-typist unfilled openings to all unfilled openings at the end of the month tended to be even higher because placement experience was not as favorable for these jobs as for many others.

This evidence is supported by the experience of other placement agencies cited

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in the survey. Private commercial schools and junior colleges have overwhelmingly more jobs to fill than graduates to place. Private placement agencies indicate a similar story--many openings, few applicants. In most big city newspapers, the help-wanted columns are replete with job offers; in some they account for a majority of the help-wanted ads.

#### Typists Openings Most Numerous; Steno Jobs Harder to Fill

During August, the demand, as reflected by local office job orders, was greater for typists than for stenographers and secretaries in all areas except Washington and Salt Lake City. In the aggregate, openings for typists totaled 11,900 and were abundant in all reporting areas. Somewhat under 4,000 typist placements were made during the month. Thus, an average of only 1 out of 3 openings was filled, and this was greater placement success than was achieved on the average with either stenographers or secretaries. Six areas were more successful in placing secretaries, one--Milwaukee--in placing both secretaries and stenographers.

The ratio of placements to openings for typists varied tremendously--from a low of 13 percent to a high of 70 percent. In 9 areas, placements ranged up to 25 percent of openings; in 17--from 26 to 50 percent; in 5--from 51 to 70 percent.

Although typists openings are more numerous, orders for stenographers are much harder to fill. The 31 reporting areas could muster only 1,500 placements for 7,500 openings in August, a ratio of 1 job filled by the local offices for every 5 openings available.

Again there was considerable variation in the ability of local offices to fill jobs. Hard-pressed Washington, where stenographers are very scarce, could fill only 3.4 percent of its jobs, while New Orleans had much less trouble and filled about two-thirds of its openings. In summary, 20 areas filled up to a fourth of

their stenographer openings; another 10 from one-fourth to one-half; and New Orleans alone filled more than one-half.

Openings for secretaries were considerably fewer in number, with many areas reporting that this type of position is frequently filled by promotion, thus restricting the number of vacancies that reach the open labor market. About 800 placements were made compared with some 2,900 openings available in surveyed areas during August, or a ratio of about 3 out of 10 jobs filled.

A comparison of placements and openings for these occupations with placements and openings for all nonagricultural occupations shows that jobs for secretaries, stenographers and typists are more difficult to fill in most surveyed areas. In every area, relatively fewer openings for stenographers were filled than for all occupations during August. In many cases, the difference in placement success was very marked. In only one area were placements of typists relatively higher, compared with openings, than all nonagricultural placements. Three areas reported a higher ratio of placements to openings for secretaries, but in two of them the figures were too small to be of real significance.

#### Unfilled Openings Are High At End of Month

The relationship between unfilled openings at the end of August and total openings available during the month complements the data on placements. As might be expected the ratios of unfilled jobs to total jobs listed in the local offices were high, further supporting the evidence of shortages of secretaries, stenographers, and typists. In all areas combined, they averaged 40 percent for typists, the same percent for secretaries, and 50 percent for stenographers. There was considerable variation among areas. Those areas which had greater placement success tended to report a relatively smaller



*Stenographer transcribing Aer shorthand notes. (photos courtesy Strayer College)*

volume of openings unfilled at the end of the month, and vice versa. The correlation, however, was not very close and it was not completely consistent.

#### What Causes the Shortage?

Why is the demand so great? The survey was conducted during August when demands in the clerical field are usually in a summer lull, when many jobs are filled by temporary student workers, and when a new supply of high school graduates has become available. Yet only a few areas--Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and New Orleans--indicated even a temporary dip in demand. And almost all expected a pickup in demand as schools reopened. In the majority of the surveyed areas, there were more openings for these occupations by the end of August than there were at the beginning.

Unquestionably, the high level of economic activity calls for expansion in this field of work as in others; a few areas consider this the dominant factor in the expanding needs for such workers. In these areas, shortages are not so marked or long-standing as in others. In most places, this is not the whole story by any means. Demand has been sustained (perhaps not at the highest, but at a very high level) even during periods of economic setback.

...the paper... business, pro-... and governmental activities so... has increased disproportion-... with our economic growth. And not... report that the caliber of... stenographers and typists is... from which it follows that it takes... workers to turn out a given amount... work. Lowered standards have been... In 1954, local offices began to... stenographic applicants for shorthand... at a rate of 60 words per minute. Formerly, the lowest speed tested was 80 words a minute.

Admitting that demand has been consistently high and has risen briskly, it is a moot question why supply has failed to adjust to demand. Entry-level proficiency for stenographers and typists can be acquired in high school. Salaries are relatively good. Hours are regular for most positions; a 5-day workweek is common. Yet the shortages persist.

#### Population and Social Patterns of Some Influence

Vital statistics offer one clue. The low birth rates of the thirties have reduced the potential new labor supply for all fields of work in the last several years. But in a predominantly female field, this situation has been accentuated by the trend of recent years to earlier marriages and to earlier family formation and larger families. According to Census data, in 1940, 22 percent of the 18- and 19-year-old women were married; in 1953--33.5 percent. In 1940, 51.3 percent of the women 20-24 years old were married; in 1953--69.1 percent. It is estimated that somewhat over half of the first babies are now born a year after marriage.

The labor market implications are quite plain. Young women's attachment to the labor market prior to assuming home responsibilities is of shorter duration. Therefore, despite higher overall rates of labor force participation by women, the

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...younger women have been de-... labor market dropouts of young women have been on the rise, greatly increasing replacement needs. The Houston report describes this very graphically. "For many years these three occupations have been like bottomless pails--despite constant filling, the withdrawals are of almost even volume."

#### Changes in Educational Patterns

An increasing proportion of girls who graduate from high school now go on to college. This not only tends to reduce the supply of stenographers and typists, but also delays the entry into the labor force of those who do enter this line of work. A recent increase has not been facilitating but has been quite marked indeed. In some areas, for example, where high school graduates were less numerous in 1955 than in 1954, anywhere from 10 to 18 percent more graduates were expected to go on to college this year.

But more important are the courses taken by high school girls who do not intend to go on to college. Unfortunately, there is only fragmentary information readily available from which to draw conclusions. Some relevant information is available from the Office of Education. In the 1933-34 school year, 405,000 high school students (9.0 percent) out of a total enrollment of 4.5 million took shorthand. Fifteen years later, only 422,000 students (7.8 percent) out of a total enrollment of 5.4 million took shorthand. Enrollments increased 20 percent; the number taking shorthand, a mere 4 percent.

The number of girls and boys studying typing did not follow a similar course. Over 60 percent more students studied typing in the 1948-49 school year than in 1933-34. However, the very substantial increase may not have benefited the labor market quite so impressively. Many students learn to operate a typewriter for



for their own convenience or as a desirable preparation for other occupational work.

According to school board statistics for the Nation's Capital, 3,200 students studied shorthand in Washington, D. C. high schools in 1940. In 1954, only 1,000 students were taking these courses--a decline of 68 percent, while total high school enrollment declined only 31 percent. Students studying typing dropped slightly less than enrollment, decreasing from 4,000 to 3,500, or 29 percent. In 1940, 19 percent of all students took shorthand and typing courses; in 1954, only 9 percent. This decline is particularly dramatic in view of the exceptional demand for stenographers and typists in the Nation's Capital.

The insufficient number of high school students taking commercial courses with the intent of working as stenographers and typists is probably the most important limitation on supply, and therefore, probably the most important reason for the shortages which prevail. San Francisco reports, "Twice a year, the area's employers pounce upon the meager supply of new graduates available for clerical employment, a supply which immediately disappears without leaving a trace..." And

the same situation is implied in other area reports. Many shortages are avoided by recruiting office help from a large proportion of the graduates who are with commercial training but "spelling for" employment-wise before they are even in the labor market. This is true also of business schools and colleges.

#### Training

Facilities for teaching shorthand and typing courses were reported to be adequate in all but one area. In Denver, facilities are being taxed to the utmost, but a new school building now under construction should relieve the situation. In San Francisco, students occasionally have to wait to be admitted to a course.

In some areas there are night courses. Refresher training and adult education courses are offered by schools in several areas. These courses are usually free or at a nominal tuition fee. Private schools also offer training in these occupations, and some colleges give secretarial courses.

The problem is lack of students. But what of the students who take the high school courses? Is their training ade-

...the answer is that the students who are sufficiently mastered in the subject can get jobs on completion of high school.

For a considerable number, this is not the case. According to local reports, a surprising number of graduates who are tested by local public employment offices are not competent to do stenography or typing without further training. However, not all graduates are tested. In some areas, superior students are recruited for jobs before the end of the school year. Some graduates do not apply for jobs at local employment offices. One area reports that 85 percent of the high school students tested could not take dictation at even the very low rate of 60 words per minute; only 5 percent could achieve 80 words. The situation is not of equal seriousness in all areas, but it is mentioned with emphasis by most. An exception is Salt Lake City where "...public schools have a reputation of releasing such well-trained stenographers and typists that industry absorbs all available graduates..."

Some of the inadequately trained graduates may take additional training, but more are likely to drift into other work. They are lost to the labor market as far as typing, or more often, stenographic work, is concerned.

#### The Influence of Labor Market Factors

Today there are many job opportunities for women. They are being urged to go into teaching, nursing, social work. The factories need them; so do stores and restaurants and service establishments. Entry can be gained to many nonprofessional jobs with a high school diploma and little, if any, specialized training.

The attraction of other job fields also characterized by mounting demand is undoubtedly one of the reasons more girls are not taking shorthand and typing. Among

...trained commercial courses are some who go into other occupations where shorthand and typing, particularly the latter, are needed only incidentally. For example, many jobs for receptionists and clerks call for a knowledge of typing.

Some areas reported that factory employment attracts women workers because of the possibility of better initial earnings, even though average weekly salaries of secretaries, stenographers, and typists in 17 large cities, as revealed by Bureau of Labor Statistics wage surveys, appear relatively good. Among the 17 areas, the lowest average figure was \$40.50 for typists, \$51.50 for stenographers, and \$60.50 for secretaries, all in Memphis. The highest average weekly earnings were \$53.00 for typists in Chicago, \$65.00 for stenographers in San Francisco, and \$75.00 for secretaries also in Chicago. Average salaries were higher for technical stenographers and typists with more complex assignments.

But the averages conceal a wide variation in compensation. Some jobs pay much less than others, and it's often the poorer paying ones that go to the entry worker. Where close-to-average salaries can be had by beginners, the poorer-paying jobs go unfilled. Otherwise, some entry workers take them; others go into different fields of employment which offer better initial salaries.

In a good many--but not all--of the reporting areas, wage factors are considered a stumbling block in filling some individual jobs, but are not generally thought to be a major limitation on supply.

#### Some Supply Is Available

At the end of August, local public employment office files in the surveyed areas contained applications for employment in these three occupations in goodly numbers. The crude figures need qualification, however, as area comments quickly re-

They include an apparent unwillingness by all--employed workers to apply for better-paying jobs, who have found jobs on their own, who are waiting for employment, and applicants who have been referred to jobs for which placements had not yet been veri-

Files further include some applicants with such marginal proficiency that their attachment to these occupations highly nebulous. Louisville reports that "Test results showed many of the applicants pitifully lacking in proficiency in typing and taking dictation." This theme appeared in report after report.

#### Employer and Applicant Attitudes Impede Full Utilization

However, the files also include persons available for employment who have at least minimum acceptable skills. That they are without jobs, even temporarily, when there are jobs to be filled is due to many factors.

Age is probably the most common non-performance specification imposed by employers. As it happens, the majority of applicants for secretary, stenographer, and typists jobs are young enough to meet age limit specifications, but the minority who exceed the local age-preferred cutoff point--generally between 35 and 45--is not insignificant. In most areas, their labor market is considerably narrower than for the younger workers.

Upper age limits specified by employers on local office openings reveal the decided preference for younger workers in these occupations. At the end of August, about one-third of the unfilled openings for secretaries and stenographers and over one-fifth of those for typists had no age specifications. The absence of age specifications on this sizable group of openings cannot, unfortunately, be construed to represent a complete absence of age discrimination for these openings.

Persistent persuasion by local office staff in a number of areas appears to have resulted in some success in eliminating the specifications without a corresponding success in changing hiring practices.

The openings with upper-age limits showed a preponderance of jobs available only to those up to age 35. Openings for those over age 45 (apart from orders with no age limits) were very limited. Placements of more mature women were similarly few.

Data on the ages of applicants placed during August and applicants in the file at the end of August in local offices of the 31 areas further reveal quite clearly that it is easier to place the younger applicants. For each of these occupations, those over age 35 comprised a higher proportion of the file than of the placements. The difference between placements and applicants over age 45 was particularly marked.

Personality and appearance are stressed by many employers and are often legitimate requirements where dealing with people is important. Personality problems, which were reported to characterize some applicants in all areas, appear to be a greater barrier to employment

Inter-area recruitment is conducted by State employment security agencies through United States Employment Service clearance procedures in an effort to fill jobs for which local labor supplies are inadequate. Since 1950, openings placed in clearance for stenographers, typists, and secretaries have outnumbered clearance openings for other occupational fields with the exception of professional engineers (since 1952), machinists (in 1952 and 1953), and skilled machine tool operators (in 1953). Out-of-area recruitment for clerical and sales jobs have been consistently concentrated in the hard-to-fill secretarial, stenographic, and typing positions which have constituted at least 75 percent and as much as 84 percent of all clerical and sales openings in clearance.

In 3 of the last 6 years, aggregate inventory openings for secretaries, stenographers, and typists have averaged 10 percent or more of all jobs in clearance. In August, local offices were recruiting nonlocal workers for 2,038 stenographer, typist, and secretary vacancies. The clearance openings in these occupations increased to 2,479 in October when total clearance openings numbered 23,600.

Table 1. Distribution of  
Applicants for Jobs in 31 Areas, by Age  
August 1955

	Secretaries		Stenographers		Typists	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
<b>Applicants</b>						
All Ages	836	100.0	1,470	100.0	3,961	100.0
35 and under	579	69.2	1,121	76.2	3,311	83.6
36-45	178	21.3	230	15.7	418	10.5
Over 45	79	9.5	119	8.1	232	5.9
<b>Employments</b>						
All Ages	2,628	100.0	2,563	100.0	9,255	100.0
35 and under	1,299	49.5	1,642	64.1	6,773	73.2
36-45	645	24.5	409	15.9	1,267	13.7
Over 45	684	26.0	512	20.0	1,215	13.1

than physical handicaps. Most areas reported that physically handicapped applicants are acceptable to employers if the handicap does not interfere with performance. A few indicated that nonhandicapped workers are preferred.

Skill and experience requirements vary considerably and are generally more or less stringent, according to the severity of the shortage. A high school diploma is required everywhere for any of the three occupations. Business school or college training is often preferred for secretaries if hired at the entry level but less often if the applicants are experienced. Proficiency and experience are preferred, but the inexperienced are hired if they can meet minimum performance standards. Minimum standards are highly variable among areas and even within an area. They may call for a typing speed of from 40 to 60 words per minute, and a shorthand speed of anywhere from 60 to 100 words per minute.

Minority group workers--predominantly nonwhites--find discrimination in

private employment widespread. In most northern and some of the border States areas, colored applicants find sufficient employment opportunities in Federal, State, or local government and the limited jobs available to them in private industry. In most of the southern areas surveyed, there is virtually no demand for and no supply of Negro workers in these occupations.

Salaries offered by employers and demanded by applicants cause some mismatching of demand and supply. This is one of the important reasons why there are some well-qualified applicants not immediately placeable even where shortages are quite severe. A competent secretary or stenographer with years of experience may not be willing to accept a salary offer which does not match her recent earnings. Most employers want to start their workers at less than what they feel the terminal salary should be.

At the opposite end of the pole, some entry workers with little or no experience

... of what earnings they  
hand under local labor market

... .

Marital, family, and residence status  
is a placement impediment for some ap-  
plicants. There is widespread reluctance  
to hire women with young children. In  
addition, areas located near military es-  
tablishments have many applicants who  
are wives of servicemen. They are often  
not acceptable to employers for permanent  
jobs because of the uncertain duration of  
their local residence. Similarly, employ-  
ers in areas which attract immigrants,  
like Miami and Denver, prefer to hire  
permanent residents.

Part-time and temporary work is de-  
sired by many applicants in most surveyed  
areas. There is, however, little demand  
for this kind of employment except in New

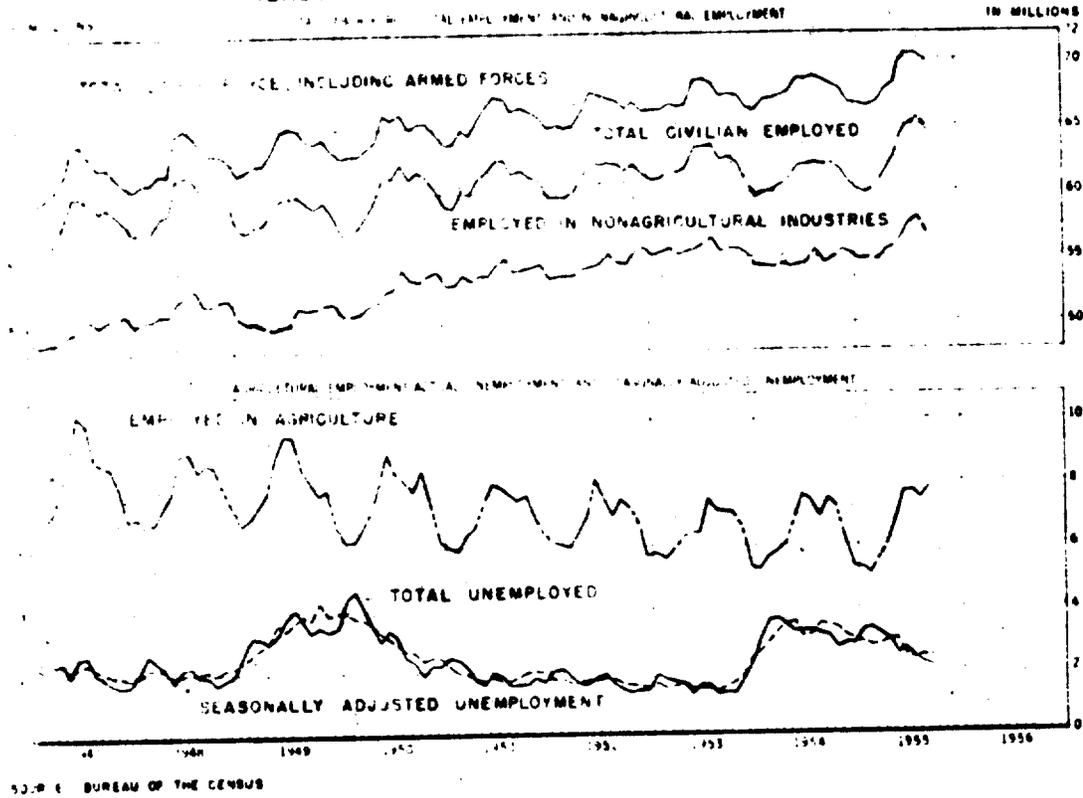
York, which reports a shortage of part-  
time jobseekers. Applicant preferences  
regarding location, hours, duties, and  
working conditions contribute added fric-  
tion to the recruitment problem.

The mismatching of jobs and appli-  
cants, of course, is often due to a combi-  
nation of the circumstances described  
rather than to any single one.

#### The Outlook is for Continued Stringencies

Job openings for secretaries, stenog-  
raphers, and typists are expected to con-  
tinue to be plentiful. Unless more people  
go into these occupations than have been  
doing so in recent years on the long-run  
uptrend in demand is unexpectedly heavy,  
the supply is not likely to be adequate in  
the areas surveyed, and presumably in  
many others, for some time to come.

TRENDS IN THE LABOR FORCE, 1947 TO DATE



LABOR FORCE ESTIMATES

Persons 14 years of age and over  
September and October 1955, and October 1954

Employment Status	Oct. 9-15 1955	Sept. 11-17 1955	Oct. 3-9 1954	Net Change	
				Sept.-Oct. 1955	Oct. 1954- Oct. 1955
Total labor force	67,292	66,882	64,882	+410	+2,410
Employed	65,161	64,733	62,141	+428	+3,020
Agricultural	7,905	7,875	7,239	+30	+666
Nonagricultural	57,256	56,858	54,902	+398	+2,354
Unemployed	2,131	2,149	2,741	-18	-610
Total labor force	47,499	47,781	48,357	-282	-858
Seasonally adjusted unemployment index (1947=100)	105	96	135		

Bureau of the Census